

Preface



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Guest Editors

As clearly highlighted in the recent Institute of Medicine report titled *The Future of Emergency Care in the United States Health System*, emergency medicine and emergency departments (EDs) play a critical role within the American health system in providing needed care to millions of individuals every year. EDs are situated in a critical location at the interface of the American population and entry into hospitals and the medical care system. One cannot wear blinders and work in EDs; all of the health problems and many of the social problems of our society come to rest on our doorstep. Community members often view EDs as the main door into hospitals, and health professionals can conceptually understand the ED as a window on the health and social needs of our people.

This issue of the *Emergency Medicine Clinics of North America* focuses on the spectrum of public health issues that pertain to the practice of emergency medicine and that are faced by practicing emergency physicians every day. Topics include public health research in the ED; respiratory threats; emerging infectious diseases; ED overcrowding; end-of-life care; racial and ethnic disparities; issues of health promotion and disease prevention encompassing substance and alcohol abuse, injury, and violence; as well as public health surveillance, including the impacts of homeless and disadvantaged patients.

Understanding the interplay between medicine and public health is critical to addressing the health needs of Americans. This *Emergency Medicine Clinics* introduces and helps define many of the key public health issues impacting emergency practitioners. These issues are not abstractions, but are faced by us on a daily basis as we try to help the homeless to find needed

health care or look for ways to prevent a chronic drinker from driving while intoxicated. These articles discuss important modern societal problems that are part of the context in which we currently practice.

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